



Culture of care case studies (ENGLISH)

A series of case studies developed by a group of 3Rs centres (logos above) to accompany a [webinar series focusing on culture of care](#) (June 2023).

We encourage animal care staff to use these to consider scenarios around the topic of culture of care in their own time, for example as part of a team meeting.

Case study 1: Caring for my dogs

I work in the faculty of veterinary science and my role can be split across research and clinical care. Doing this brings ethical dilemmas and makes me question what 'care' is.

Currently I am responsible for the welfare of the laboratory dogs that we are testing new therapies for chronic kidney disease on. In doing this I will have to euthanise dogs that develop disease symptoms when they reach a humane endpoint. When working in the veterinary clinic I help support the vets to treat and/or try to cure dogs that develop kidney disease, even beyond what would be classed as the humane endpoint in research. Some of my colleagues, who only work in veterinary practice, think it is morally wrong not to treat laboratory animals for as long as possible.

Discussion points

What's the difference between a research dog and a dog treated at the veterinary clinic? How might that that explain the different approaches to care?

How can the technician relate to colleagues who work in the veterinary clinic who consider that the laboratory dogs should be treated for as long as possible?

How does the technician explain how they care?

Case study 2: Too late to feed my pigs

I have always wanted to work with large animals and enjoyed my induction and training at the large animal facility I have just started working at. One day I bumped into a technician who took care of the pigs before I started. They told me that it was super easy to look after the pigs and for people who know what they are doing it shouldn't take more than 30 minutes to take care of a stable and give the pigs everything they need for a day.

It takes me one hour to do the basics in a stable because I want to give the pigs the best care possible by providing them with enrichment every day and generally interacting with them. A knot forms in my stomach and I worry about being compared to my colleague. I want to keep my job and start trying to work faster without neglecting the care for the pigs. For several days I manage, although I get more and more tired and stressed by the workload.

One day I am late for work because I overslept. I rush to complete my work but forget to feed the pigs in an ongoing metabolism study at the time specified by the researcher, so they receive the food one hour late. The researcher arrives as I feed the last pig and gets very angry because their experiment will be impacted. A few hours later I get call from my supervisor as the researcher has reported me.

Discussion points

What would you have done in this situation?

Do you think the technician should be reprimanded for what they have done, and if so why and how?

What does this scenario tell you about the facility's culture?

What does the organisation need to do, to avoid such a situation in the future?

Case study 3: My first experiment

I am a new technician supporting the animal studies in the oncology research group and have just started my first experiment on genetically modified mice. I need to perform a difficult injection into the eye of the mice, and I don't want anything to go wrong because I only have a small number of mice available and because I don't want to cause them unnecessary pain. I have done the initial training to make sure I have a licence, but I am nervous partly because I have had little opportunity to practice handling mice regularly. My supervisor has shown me the technique twice and observed me once. My supervisor was supposed to be with me today to oversee the injections but he is ill. I feel uncomfortable doing this procedure with no supervision, but I know this experiment is time critical because the substance I am using to inject into the eyes is not stable and I don't want to let the research group down. My supervisor tells me I am able to do this on my own and that I am very capable. I don't know what to do as I feel differently but I know if I don't do this today the mice will be wasted. I decide to continue. My hand shook a bit, but I think it went ok. Two days later I need to kill four of the six mice due to eye issues. My supervisor tells me this has nothing to do with my technique, but I am not sure, and I feel dreadful. I asked my supervisor if the eyes could be sent for pathology assessment to see if it was my technique, but he says he hasn't the money. I am not sure I want to continue doing research in live animals.

Discussion points

Does this situation sound familiar? Have you experience similar situations where there are these difficult decisions to be made about whether to continue with an experiment? Please share your experience.

What would you have done differently?

What additional support do you feel should be available from the supervisor?

What should the organisation do to ensure technicians are supported well and to prevent similar events?

How does this situation relate to Culture of Care?

Case study 4: My dream job

As a child I grew up with lots of pets. I loved mice and hamsters. Whilst I have always understood why animals are needed to be used in research, I have also had concerns about their potential suffering. I had a dream job in mind that involved contributing to research that could help discover new treatments for diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's whilst caring for the animals and ensuring their best welfare. It felt like a job I could feel proud about. I was really excited when I got a job working in a breeding unit for genetically altered mice within an academic institution. In the first few months I was busy learning how to care for the mice, to observe them for welfare concerns and how to enter all the information on the computer system. I often wondered what became of the mice I had cared for. After about six months I asked my manager if we could ask the researchers to come and talk to us about their work and how the mice had played a part. My manager told me she had asked before on several occasions, but everyone is always so busy. She said she would ask again. I have now been here for two years, and I don't love my job the way I did at the start. I feel invisible, we never hear about the research, the new treatments or how the mice we have bred have been used. No one thanks us for the care we given the mice. Sometimes we even get asked to kill mice because there are more than can be used in the research and this is something I hate. My dream job is not the dream I imagined. I could be working in a factory.

Discussion points

What should happen differently from your point of view and why?

If a similar situation took place at your facility what could the organisation do to support the animal technicians to learn more about the fate of "their" mice?

From your personal point of view, which different roles should take responsibility in a situation like this?

How does this situation relate to Culture of Care?

Case study 5: Late night working

I am an animal technician working at an academic institution. One of the research groups is very well resourced and there are a large number of post-docs using mice. The focus of the group is neuroscience and some of the procedures involve complex and sometimes lengthy surgery. I have observed that many of the researchers in the group work very long hours and that this is seen as a positive thing by the academic lead. I have also observed that the surgeries are often performed later in the evening when there are no technicians or vets available to help. I am concerned that some of the post-docs are not staying to make sure the mice are fully recovered from the anaesthetic/surgery before they go home. I don't have any evidence other than the fact that the individual post-surgery check sheets are often not completed and sometimes the mice don't look well the next day although the post-docs say this is normal because of the nature of the surgery. Occasionally a mouse is found dead in the morning. I am not the only technician to be concerned but the academic lead is very influential bringing in significant grant funding and rarely visits the animal facility.

Discussion points

How should the technician's concerns be voiced and to whom?

What is your view of the situation? Do you think late surgeries should be allowed?

What should the organisation do to put processes in place that can avoid such concerns being raised again?

What does this story tell you about the Culture?